

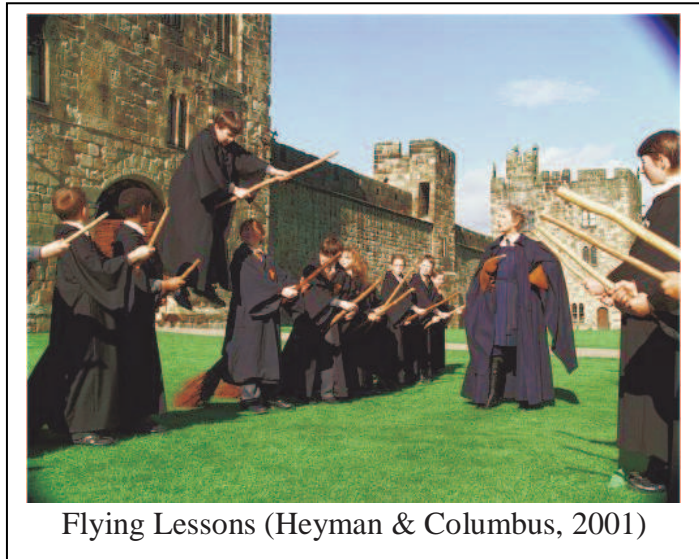
Teaching with Technology at Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry:
Lessons from Harry Potter

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Arthur C. Clarke (1972) wrote that "any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic." Therefore, it's only logical that characters who teach with magic can help us teach with technology. In a series of best-selling books and major motion pictures, J.K. Rowling's young wizard, Harry Potter, attends Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry, where lessons may include brewing a potion, reading tea leaves, or flying a broomstick (Rowling, 1997, 1999a, 1999b). This poster uses examples from the Harry Potter books and movies to illustrate guidelines for applying technology in the classroom.

In a scene from the first movie, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (Heyman & Columbus, 2001), Madam Hooch introduces a group of first-year students to a basic piece of wizarding equipment, the flying broomstick. Like many classes at Hogwarts (and, perhaps, at our own institutions), things start off well but tend to go downhill rather quickly. Madam Hooch's experience reminds us of two important points:



Flying Lessons (Heyman & Columbus, 2001)

- *Approach new things in small steps.* Madam Hooch begins by simply having the students make the broomsticks rise into their hands. Then she tells them to mount, kick off, rise a few feet off the ground, and then come back down again. Trouble starts when one of the students, Neville Longbottom, accidentally soars too high and falls, breaking his wrist. Just like Neville, students can have a bad experience with technology if they try to do too much too soon.
- *Supervise closely in the beginning.* The class really unravels when Madam Hooch leaves the students alone to take Neville to the infirmary. In her absence, Harry and his arch-rival, Draco Malfoy, get into an aerial dogfight that nearly ends in disaster. Don't leave your students on their own with new technology too soon; monitor and coach them until they're ready to fly solo.



Exploding Feather
(Heyman & Columbus, 2001)

Later in the same movie, Professor Flitwick's Levitation class offers some additional tips:

- *Use easy tasks to build confidence, then scale up.* Professor Flitwick's first exercise is to levitate a feather, not a lead weight. But his approach is scalable to larger tasks, since a student later uses the same incantation on a mountain troll's gigantic club. Start students on simple tasks to generate early success, but be sure the basic method is sound and can later be used for more substantial, realistic applications.
- *Have a back-up plan in case something blows up in your face.* One student (Seamus Finnigan) gets the

spell wrong and causes incineration instead of flotation. Harry, sitting beside him, says, "I think we're going to need another feather over here, Professor." (Haven't we all had a student like Seamus, for whom everything seems to go awry?)

In the second film, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (Heyman & Columbus, 2002), Herbology Professor Sprout leads a field trip to Greenhouse Three. Her lesson on how to repot a Mandrake reminds us of the following:

- *Always check your equipment.* In the Hogwarts Greenhouse, that means providing earmuffs to protect against the Mandrakes' cries. In a technology classroom, it includes making sure you have the right hardware and software (including the right version) for your application, and making sure that it all works together.
- *Review the theory; demonstrate the technique; then let students practice.* Professor Sprout first discusses the basic properties of Mandrakes with her class. Second, she demonstrates the proper method for safely repotting a Mandrake. Only then does she let her young wizards-to-be practice "hands on" with their own Mandrakes. That's a good sequence of steps to follow for teaching any new technology.



Herbology (Heyman & Columbus, 2002)



Pixies Attack (Heyman & Columbus, 2002)

Chamber of Secrets also introduces Professor Gilderoy Lockhart, the new Defense Against the Dark Arts instructor. He provides an outstanding example of how *not* to run a technology class, illustrating these guidelines:

- *Lay the groundwork first.* Lockhart begins the session by simply unleashing a horde of pixies (small, flying blue troublemakers) and telling his students to "round them up, round them up, they're only pixies!" Of course, the students have no idea how to cope, and the pixies run amok in the lecture hall. An assignment that seems simple to the instructor may prove to be daunting to the student. Always provide ample preparation before asking students to perform a task.
- *Do your own homework.* It turns out that Professor Lockhart is also unable to deal with the pixies; they steal his wand and use it to wreak additional havoc. Test your demonstrations first before trying them in front of a class, even when it seems that nothing can possibly go wrong. Anticipate potential problems and be prepared to deal with them.

The last (so far) film in the series, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (Columbus, Heyman, Radcliffe & Cuaron, 2004), shows us Lockhart's successor, Professor Remus Lupin, who quickly becomes one of Hogwarts' most beloved faculty members. A class on how to deal with a shape-shifting "boggart" illustrates his lively teaching technique. Lupin relies on three key principles:



Boggart Class (Columbus et al, 2004)

- *Have a flair for the dramatic.* When students enter Lupin's classroom, they find the tables and chairs gone, and a large, sealed wardrobe in the center of the space. The wardrobe shudders and emits frightening sounds as the boggart inside struggles to get out. Lupin prowls the edges of the room, explaining how the boggart appears menacing but is actually easy to deal with. No one is going to fall asleep in this class! Education is, at its best, theater. Avoid talking-head lectures, get students up and out of their seats, and find creative ways to get and hold their attention.

- *Make learning with technology fun.* Lupin’s anti-boggart methodology is to zap the creature into an absurd form with the incantation “*Ridikkulus!*” and then laugh it into submission. In short order he has the previously fearful students roaring with laughter and eagerly lining up for a turn at boggart-bashing. Humor dispels fear and promotes relaxation, which in turn promotes learning. Have students create a Web site on an off-the-wall subject or prepare a PowerPoint presentation on something silly. Technology is a serious subject, but we can find imaginative ways to inject some fun into the process.
- *Create a sense of achievement.* For his first demonstration, Lupin calls on Neville Longbottom, the usually hapless student who, in earlier classes, tumbled from his broomstick and blew up his feather. When Neville, with Lupin’s coaching, succeeds in vanquishing the boggart on his first try, the look of surprise and accomplishment on his face is truly what teaching is all about. We succeed as educators by creating opportunities for our students to succeed, and making sure they’re ready and able to seize those opportunities,

You don’t have to be a wizard to teach with technology. But it can’t hurt to pick up a few pointers from Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

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